Twitter Thread by We need 3 million vaccinations a day ■

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@Noahpinion

1/Alright, gather round, friends, and let me tell you the story of 1930s Japan, and how it's a cautionary tale for 2020s

2/Everyone knows that Japan became militarist, fascist, and (even more) expansionist in the 30s.

But what few people know is that this followed 6 years of coup attempts by EVEN MORE militarist/fascist/expansionist lunatics.

So let's review that history.

> Most people know that Japan was taken over by right-wing elements of the military in the 1930s. What is less known is that this takeover followed years of coup attempts by even *more* right-wing factions. Wikipedia lists 5 coup attempts in Japan during the 1930s, though I think there were probably a number of smaller uprisings as well. The listed coup attempts are:
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> 1. The March Incident
> 2. The October Incident
> 3. The May 15th Incident
> 4. The Military Academy Incident
> 5. The February 26th Incident

3/The first coup attempt was the March Incident in 1931.

Basically, some right-wing army officers planned to stage a riot to provoke martial law, and install a military dictator.

It failed when they couldn't get enough people to riot.

The March Incident - 1931

A rightist organization within the Japanese Army, led by Lt. Col. Hashimoto Kingoro and Captain Cho Isamu, decided to overthrow the government and to implement a totalitarian militarist egalitarian utopia. Their plan was to start a riot, forcing the government to declare martial law, then install a popular general (Ugaki Kazushige) in power. But despite two attempts, they failed to start a big enough riot, and Ugaki didn't back them, and the whole thing fizzled.

The coup plotters were only lightly punished, partly because Ugaki wanted the whole thing hushed up (for obvious reasons).

4/The coup plotters weren't really punished, so they just tried again a few months later. Some of their co-conspirators ratted them out and they failed again.

But AGAIN THEY WEREN'T PUNISHED! People defended them, saying they were simply too patriotic. ■

The October Incident (also known as the Imperial Colors Incident) - 1931

Hashimoto and Cho tried another coup attempt just a few months after their first one failed! Big surprise. This time the plan was to assassinate some prominent civilian politicians and seize government buildings. With Ugaki out of the picture, the plotters decided to install Araki Sadao, a right-wing general, as dictator.

But this one fell apart too. Some young plotters defected and tipped off the military police. Araki himself arrested Hashimoto and Cho and tossed them in jail. But leading generals declared that Hashimoto and Cho were merely being excessively patriotic, so they were sentenced to nothing more than a few days of house arrest.

5/These coup plotters wanted the following:

1. A military dictator
2. Aggressive military action against Japan's rivals (i.e. every other country)
3. Increased colonial expansionism
4. Some mumbo-jumbo about cultural purity and economic egalitarianism

6/Anyway, a year later, some different coup plotters tried again. This time their plan involved lots of assassinations. They successfully assassinated the Prime Minister, but failed to kill the visiting Charlie Chaplin (which they hoped would provoke a war with the U.S.

The May 15 Incident - 1932

This time the coup came from Navy officers, though some Army officers were also involved. They also got help from a rightist organization called the League of Blood, which was in the habit of assassinating leading politicians. The Navy guys were pissed off that Japan had signed a treaty with the U.S. and Britain that limited the size of Japan's naval forces.

Anyway, this plot wasn't as intricate or utopian as the two mentioned above, but what it lacked in strategy it made up for in ferocity. A bunch of young naval officers successfully assassinated the Prime Minister, Inukai Tsuyoshi, and tried and failed to assassinate some other politicians. They also tried to assassinate the visiting **Charlie Chaplin**, in the hopes of provoking a war between the U.S. and Japan, but he was out at a sumo match and they didn't find him.

7/But despite killing Japan's elected leader, the coup plotters received only light punishment!!

There was an outpouring of popular support on their behalf. They thus received only a short stint in jail...which of course encouraged further coup attempts.

The coup participants then *turned themselves in* to the cops. They were court-martialed, but they loudly declared that they were acting out of patriotism and loyalty to the Emperor. Over 100,000 regular Japanese people sent in letters demanding clemency for the assassins. Many of these were either signed or written in blood, and some included severed fingers. As a result, the court gave the assassins only a very short jail sentence.

8/Anyway then there was another coup attempt a couple years later that never got off the ground, but of course no one was punished.

The Military Academy Incident - 1934

Some officers in the Japanese Army were pissed that Araki Sadao (one of the generals that the earlier coup plotters had wanted to install as dictator) had been recently fired. Their plan was to seize control of the government. But one of the participants ratted the others out, and they were arrested. All were given very light punishments as usual.

9/But finally, in 1936, the big one came.

A large number of junior army officers, with troops to back them, and sympathies from some generals, launched a huge insurrection aimed at assassinating senior politicians and seizing control of government buildings.

The February 26 Incident - 1936

And now for the grand finale. Again, a bunch of lower-level Japanese Army officers decided that the government was corrupt and needed to be overthrown, so that purity could be restored, an egalitarian society established, and an aggressive foreign policy implemented against Japan's international rivals (i.e., pretty much every other country). Although the officers were somewhat affiliated with the so-called "Imperial Way" faction that revered the idea of the Emperor, they planned to depose the actual Emperor, Hirohito, if he didn't agree with their plans. The ringleaders were Nishida Mitsugi, Kurihara Yasuhide, Ando Teruzo, Kono Hisashi, Muranaka Takaji, and Isobe Asaichi.

The plan was to assassinate a bunch of centrist political leaders and seize control of the Imperial Palace. This time, they released a big dramatic manifesto. They gathered a bunch of young impressionable soldiers to their banner, and attempted to assassinate seven major political figures. Three of the assassination attempts succeeded. They seized the Ministry of War, attacked a major liberal newspaper, and occupied the Tokyo police headquarters. They tried to seize the Imperial Palace, but failed.

10/Some generals sympathized with the insurrectionists, but the Emperor and a critical mass of loyalists opposed them. Eventually they were arrested.

This time -- FINALLY -- the government meted out harsh punishments, executing 17 of the plotters and imprisoning others.

The rebels also met with some top generals and tried to get their sympathy. When much of the military brass met unofficially to discuss what to do about the coup attempt, these generals persuaded the others to send a sympathetic message, declaring that the rebels were acting out of sincere patriotism. But Emperor Hirohito strongly opposed the coup, along with various loyalist generals.

Over the next few days, the Emperor's loyalist forces attempted to talk the rebels down, but failed. The loyalist forces then surrounded the vastly outnumbered rebels and arrested them (some committed suicide).

This time, the government finally realized that they couldn't afford to keep going easy on seditious coup plotters. They tried 143 of the rebels and executed 17 of the ringleaders.

11/But now here's the thing. The Japanese government went on to do pretty much exactly what the coup plotters wanted!

They put the military in charge of the country! They tried to colonize all of Asia! And they started a war with the U.S.!

Oops.

Aftermath

That was the last coup attempt in 1930s Japan. The coup plotters finally overreached and got into trouble, and the authority of the emperor and conservative generals was strengthened. But weirdly, the coup participants ended up getting much of what they wanted. The military became dominant in Japanese society and government, and took a more aggressive approach toward Japan's international rivals. In a few years, that new militarism and expansionism led to World War 2, and the brutal end of the Japanese Empire.

12/So what can we learn from Japan's failures in the 1930s?

Fortunately, the coup attempt of 1/6/2020 didn't come from within the military. Nor does Trump support or fascism in general come from the military. So that's one positive difference.

All of these attempts were led by colonels and lower-level officers within the Imperial Japanese military — 4 by members of the Army, one by members of the Navy. This immediately demonstrates one big difference with the modern U.S. — here, the military stayed out of the fracas, declaring forcefully that its loyalty is to the Constitution and that it will not interfere in the process of elections. Instead, the ringleaders here appear to have been online militants and right-wing state politicians.

13/Another positive difference is that the U.S. does not currently have a tradition of "government by assassination", as Japan did then. In the 60s we did, but assassinations are thankfully rare now.

Another difference between 1930s Japan and 2020s America is that Japan had a multi-decade history of "government by assassination", with many prominent politicians and leaders having been killed during the decades of dysfunctional democracy leading up to the 1930s. In the U.S., our similar period of assassination was in the 60s and 70s.

14/BUT, there are some disturbing similarities between 1930s Japan's crazies and the right-wingers who stormed the Capitol on 1/6.

But then there are the disturbing similarities. The Japanese coup attempts were carried out by rightists who believed that they were defending the true Japanese spirit from a corrupt political, media, and business elite. They believed fanatically in the Emperor, not entirely unlike how the MAGA insurrectionists revere Trump. Most importantly, they had considerable support within the Japanese populace, and politicians often gave them a pass because they assumed the rebels were acting out of an excess of patriotism.

15/The first big lesson from the failures of 1930s Japan is:

PUNISH THE PLOTTERS HARSHLY THE FIRST TIME.

Don't wait for the coup attempts to escalate! Don't call the coup plotters "patriots"! Don't let them off with a slap on the wrist!

Lesson 1: Punish the plotters. The people who stormed Capitol Hill, menaced Congress, and tried to overturn an election were not acting out of patriotism. Treating them with kid gloves or giving them a slap on the wrist would simply encourage further such insurrections, as it did in Japan. Instead, everyone who participated in the seizure of Capitol Hill should be arrested, tried, and incarcerated. That includes sitting state legislators. The FBI should also investigate the activist movements that supported the effort, and arrest anyone who was provably involved in the plotting of the coup attempt. If necessary that should include Trump himself, after he's out of office.

16/The second big lesson is:

DON'T GIVE IN TO THE COUP PLOTTERS' IDEOLOGY.

Japan basically became what the rightists wanted. We musn't do that.

Lesson 2: Don't do what the plotters want. In Japan, politicians responded to repeated coup attempts by essentially doing some of what the perpetrators wanted, aggressively attacking other countries and putting the military in charge of the government. In the U.S., it would be utter folly to do something similar. Trying to appease angry MAGA mobsters with some sort of right-wing or pro-Trump policies would be similarly foolish. Remember, Imperial Japan came to a bad end as a direct result of doing the things that its radical rightists demanded.

17/Remember, a slap on the wrist will just encourage the same assholes to be bolder the next time.

The first of Japan's many coups was even less impressive than what we saw on 1/6!

Because it wasn't punished, it encouraged more and more.

The March Incident - 1931

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18/We're a more stable country than 1930s Japan, with better institutions.

But if we give coup plotters a slap on the wrist, and call them "patriots", we too will go down the path of chaos and fascism.

(end)

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